Interview With Judge Brenda Harbin-Forte

Photo: Zhou Xiang Xing

Judge Brenda Harbin-Forte, Superior Court of Alameda County

We are lucky to have Judge Brenda Harbin-Forte for this interview. Judge Harbin-Forte is a former PJ of the juvenile department of the Superior Court of Alameda County and received the Wilmont Sweeney Juvenile Court Judge of the Year Award from the Juvenile Court Judges of California in 2003. Last year, she agreed to review CJER's second online course, which covers juvenile dependency hearings. Her contributions, along with those of our other reviewers, were invaluable in the development of the course. In this interview, we ask Judge Harbin-Forte what it was like to be a reviewer and about her views on the online course that was recently launched on the Serranus Education site (http://serranus.courtinfo.ca.gov/education).

TechGuide: Judge Harbin-Forte, please tell us about your background on the bench, and describe your current assignment as well as your term as PJ in the juvenile court.
Judge Harbin-Forte: I was appointed to the bench in 1992. I have handled practically every assignment during my 12-year tenure, from misdemeanor and felony arraignments to civil and criminal jury trials and the drug court. I served as the presiding judge of our juvenile court for four years, from 2000 through 2003. This year I am handling preliminary hearings and felony and misdemeanor jury trials. On the judicial education front, I served as dean of the Judicial College and chair of the New Judge Education Committee in 2001 and 2002. I have also taught at various CJER programs over the past 10 years. I also served as a member of the Judicial Council from 1996 to 1999.

TechGuide: What was it like reviewing the juvenile dependency online course?

Could you tell from the initial Word document you reviewed what the course would look like when it was done?
Judge Harbin-Forte: It was actually quite thrilling to review the course. I confess that I could not actually conceptualize the final course when I reviewed the initial Word document, but when I saw the end result, the only word I could think of was *awesome!*

TechGuide: Did you find it a valuable experience participating in the development of this course?
Judge Harbin-Forte: The experience was most valuable and rewarding. Staff did an outstanding job of pulling together all aspects of dependency law, so they made it quite easy for us as reviewers to concentrate on merely enhancing an already excellent product.

TechGuide: Now that you've seen the final course on the Serranus Web site, what do you think are the benefits of such a learning tool?
Judge Harbin-Forte: This course can make a novice dependency court bench officer look like a professional! It is clearly written, it is user friendly, and it provides everything a judicial officer will need to know to handle a dependency court assignment in an efficient and fair manner.

Techguide: Do you think that judges will like being able to take the course at their own pace and at a time and place of their choosing?
Judge Harbin-Forte: Absolutely. Judicial officers will particularly appreciate the flexibility the course affords them. Not only can judicial officers learn at their leisure, but they can also easily navigate through the course when they're on the bench if they need to find a quick answer to a question.

TechGuide: Who do you think would benefit most from taking this online course?
Judge Harbin-Forte: Bench officers new to dependency court as well as those who need an update on statutory and rule changes will benefit from this course. The course is also helpful for someone who is sitting temporarily in a dependency court.

TechGuide: What information and features in the course do you think are the most helpful—for example, links to the Welfare and Institutions Code, ICWA and Title IV-E cautions, pop-up definitions of specialized terms, hypotheticals, or the glossary of juvenile court terms?
Judge Harbin-Forte: It's difficult to single out one feature that is most helpful because they're all so useful. For example, the pop-up definitions of terms is particularly helpful for new judicial

officers. The hypotheticals place bench officers in real-court situations and help them to resolve some of the thorny issues confronting dependency court judges. Dependency court has its own language, so the glossary is a great "security blanket" for those who feel unsure about terms that are often bandied about in the courtroom. And anything that helps bench officers to watch out for Title IV-E pitfalls helps the state's economy because such knowledge will ensure that we can pass the next federal Title IV-E audit, just as we did with the recent audit.

TechGuide: Do you think the interactive games and quizzes will contribute to a participant's learning experience?
Judge Harbin-Forte: Most definitely. Judges are a competitive lot in general, so most will appreciate the challenge of the games and quizzes. The games and quizzes also reinforce the written materials, so they serve as a review of the salient points made in the various sections of the course.

TechGuide: The course has links to various charts and tables in a printable format. Do you think bench officers will find these resources helpful?
Judge Harbin-Forte: The ability to print out the charts and tables is one of the things that makes this online course so great. We know that adults learn by different methods. This feature should appeal to learners who need something to "take home" with them to review and mull over after the course is over. The charts and tables also make great bench references.

TechGuide: Would you agree that bench officers will appreciate using this online course to satisfy the extra-course continuing education guideline in the Standards of Judicial Administration?
Judge Harbin-Forte: No doubt about that. At a time when we all have to tighten our financial belts, presiding judges of the various courts will also appreciate the potential cost savings in having bench officers "attend" an educational program online.

TechGuide: In what ways do you think online courses do or can complement CJER live programs and benchguides?
Judge Harbin-Forte: Online courses represent another choice in this wonderful menu of educational programs and materials offered by CJER. This allows learners with different learning styles to choose. But even for those who prefer live programs, online courses may provide a nice supplement. And this online course, because of its interactive nature, is about as close to a live course as you can get.

WELCOME TO THE NEW *TECHGUIDE*—
A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO *COURT NEWS*

Superior Court of San Francisco's Intranet

Adrienne Williams, Training Officer

The Superior Court of San Francisco County is using the court's Intranet to provide useful information and online training to judicial officers, management, and staff. Examples of what can be found on the court's Intranet are:

- Court telephone numbers
- Outside agency telephone numbers
- Help files for courtroom clerks and staff, detailing procedures for handling most common cases
- Links to outside court-related agencies
- ADA compliance information (newest site)
- Glossary of terms used in the court
- A handbook on civil procedure
- Emergency response procedures
- Guidelines governing confidentiality of information
- Guidelines for information that clerks can give to court customers without violating the prohibition against giving legal advice

ADA SITE

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance site has been by far the most popular. It is accessed daily by court staff to aid them in accommodating persons with disabilities. There is a Frequently Asked Questions page with links to AOC publications on the ADA. There are also links to the following:

- Procedures for handling requests for special accommodations
- A Judicial Council form for requesting special accommodations

- The court's disability policy
- A list of court ADA coordinators who are knowledgeable about the rules and accommodations offered by the court
- Services offered for blind and hearing-impaired persons
- Examples of accommodations offered by the court
- The text of rule 989.3 of the California Rules of Court (Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities)

The court is also using the ADA site to train staff in ADA compliance. In addition to the rules and guidelines, there is information on what is available to persons with disabilities and the procedures that must be used to grant services to those requesting them.

OTHER SITES

The court's judicial site has links to Serranus, Westlaw, Comet, and CrimeTime. The personnel site houses an array of information from union contracts, salary schedules, and personnel rules to court holidays.

LINKS TO STATUTES AND RULES OF COURT

Also of great importance on the Intranet is current information on the latest statutes and rules of court. Because the rules and statutes change periodically, it is important that court staff have access to the latest versions when assisting court customers.

Just as the public San Francisco Superior Court site serves to disseminate information to self-help users, the Intranet has made information and training materials accessible to staff within the court. This use fulfills the vision of technology advancing the goal of universal and efficient communication. ■

AT HOME

Online Storage Sites

Dennis Matsura, Senior Editor

Have you ever had to transfer a large file, one that was too big to fit onto a floppy disk, from one computer to another? You might have tried e-mailing the file, but many e-mail programs will not allow a file larger than one megabyte to be sent as an attachment. So what can you do, short of buying an expensive external read/writable CD or DVD drive? There is an easy solution, and that is to use online storage.

BENEFITS OF ONLINE STORAGE

With online storage, not only can you transfer files, but you can store them or share them with friends or colleagues. Many online storage services use Windows Explorer to copy and paste or delete files. Here's what else you can do with online storage:

- Work on and save files on the Internet for access wherever you are—at home, in court, or on the road
- Share files so that you can work collaboratively with colleagues on a project
- Save e-mails when you're on the road
- Back up your data off site
- Save critical files before changing computers
- Transfer groups of files or folders from a laptop to your desktop PC
- Share photos with friends and family

WHERE DO YOU FIND ONLINE SITES AND HOW MUCH DO THEY COST?

Not surprisingly, there are many such sites, and the costs range from totally free to free trial periods lasting from one to several days, to monthly or yearly fees. Here are a few sites and what they charge:

Yahoo Briefcase
(http://briefcase.yahoo.com/) allows users to store up to 30 megabytes of data for free. There is no mention of security, so sensitive documents should probably not be stored here.

SwiftDesk
(http://www.swiftdesk.com) offers free storage of 30 megabytes plus e-mail and a free Web site. There is no security on this site.

StreamLoad
(http://www.streamload.com/) offers unlimited storage for any kind of file, including MP3, movies, images, and music. It also offers hosting and delivery services, which may be beyond your needs. You can subscribe for a one-month trial, which will allow you to transfer files of up to 10 megabytes with a cumulative total of up to 100 megabytes. You can upgrade to enormous transfer volumes and unlimited file sizes for a $4.95 monthly fee. Caution: This site has had maintenance problems and has been down for up to 10 hours on occasion.

CryptoHeaven
(http://www.cryptoheaven.com/online-storage.htm) offers a free trial period and charges from $2.42 per month for 40 megabytes of space, expandable to 10 gigabytes. It advertises itself as a secure, private, and encrypted site.

Xdrive
(http://www.xdrive.com/) is a secure online storage service that charges $10 per month for 500 megabytes of storage space.

mydocsonline
(http://www.mydocsonline.com/) is a secure online storage service that charges $9.95 per quarter or $34.95 per year for 50 megabytes of storage. The charge ranges up to $200 per year for 1 gigabyte.

For other free storage services, go to All the Free Space at http://www.all-the-free-space.com/, which has a list of such services and their features, such as storage space size, e-mail, and security. ■

Online Judicial Courses 101

Jeff Shea, CJER Publication Attorney

Most current training courses teach us that change is good. With a background in traditional legal publishing, along with a sojourn drafting electronic forms and jury instructions, I faced a new challenge in the Education Division: creating an online self-study course for judges on juvenile dependency hearings.

Why develop a Web-based course? With increasing budget constraints, the number of CJER live courses has been reduced and travel budgets for judicial officers are being squeezed. At the same time, juvenile court bench officers must still satisfy annual training requirements. Online training, available 24/7, can fill this need until the next Juvenile Law Institute or Continuing Judicial Studies Program.

THE OBJECTIVE
What does a juvenile dependency hearing judge or commissioner need to know to perform his or her job? This is the focus of an online course, and it differs from traditional legal publishing, where the goal is usually to provide a broad discussion of the law for multiple audiences.

I looked to CJER's curriculum development plans for juvenile law for help in designing the content and learning objectives for the course. Examples of simple objectives include:
- Listing juvenile dependency hearings in proper sequence
- Stating the time limits for scheduling for each hearing
- Applying appropriate findings for each hearing to varied fact patterns
- Defining terms used in dependency hearings
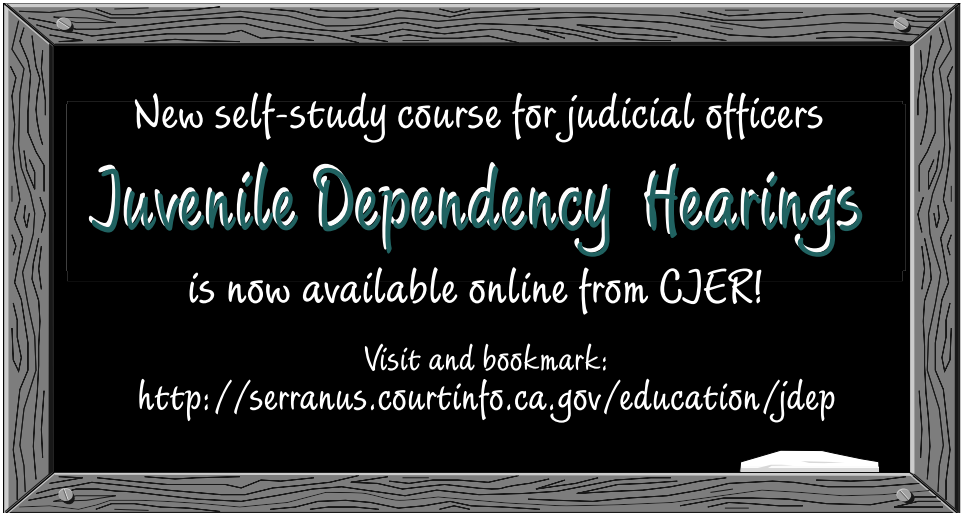
GO TO THE SOURCE
CJER's benchguides on juvenile dependency hearings provided an excellent source for the law and procedure. And existing online courses, such as the one on Proposition 36 drug diversion programs and those on ethics and security for court employees, served as models.

MAKING IT REAL
- The text was reviewed by judges who brought their real-life experiences to bear. They checked not only the accuracy of the content but also the usefulness of the interactive features.

LESSONS LEARNED
In developing content for online use, I learned some valuable lessons:
- Choose the level of complexity (this course is aimed primarily at judges with less juvenile experience).
- Stick to the learning objectives.
- Make the information interactive to increase comprehension.
- State what the judge must do.
- Compress the data.
- Divide the material into small bites, ideally visible on one or two screens.
- List elements to improve focus.

New self-study course for judicial officers
Juvenile Dependency Hearings
is now available online from CJER!
Visit and bookmark:
http://serranus.courtinfo.ca.gov/education/jdep

GOT GAME?
The biggest advantage of online courses is that students can interact with the material. Using Macromedia Flash Player™ and RealOne Player™, the dependency course features matching, sequence, and glossary preview games:
- *Matching Game.* You try to match 10 findings or principles to the correct hearing within 60 seconds. Applause sounds and a green traffic light flashes for correct answers; a horn blares and a red light flashes for wrong answers. To increase retention, the questions are randomly resorted each time you play, and increase in difficulty as you proceed.
- *Sequence Game.* You drag and drop hearings or findings into the proper sequence. Applause sounds for correct answers; a "thud" sounds for incorrect responses; the items are then realigned for a second try.
- *Glossary Preview Game.* You read a clue and type letters to guess unique juvenile court terms; after six incorrect letters, the correct answer appears.

Other learning activities include:
- *How Would You Rule?* You apply a legal principle to a fact pattern and guess the most appropriate answer.
- *Review Questions.* You take a multiple-choice or true/false quiz after each part.
- *Q&A.* This feature presents questions that go beyond the basic legal requirements and includes an audio recording of the text.
- *Tips and Cautions.* These pop-ups interject practical advice or warnings, such as critical federal law requirements.

A STICKY WICET
Unlike print publications, electronic courses can link to the primary authorities so loved by judges. This course has embedded links to the complex Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC), which governs all dependency hearings. If you click on any highlighted citation, the WIC section pops up.

HTML TO GO, PLEASE
The original Word files were converted to HTML (HyperText Markup Language), so all the user needs is Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator to take the course. Additional features were layered in and then tested by internal reviewers.

Each page of the course has a chalkboard button bar at the top and a table of contents on the left side of the screen. The table of contents was created using JavaScript™ (and some espresso, no doubt). These navigation tools allow you to easily skip from one topic to another, depending on your needs. Being able to click on a subject heading and go directly to the topic in the course represents a significant advantage over a contents page in a traditional book.

WITH A SIDE OF PDFs
In electronic publishing, you can add job aids that students can print out. This course provides useful tools in PDF format for easy printing, including:
- A flowchart of dependency hearings
- The popular CFCC chart of Title IV-E foster care findings (a must-read if you don't want to jeopardize federal funding)
- Retired Commissioner Pat Bresee's valuable chart of exceptions to family reunification services, with exceptions to exceptions (the statutes *are* written by lawyers)

LIVE IN 3–2–1
With all the features in place, an outside panel of dependency experts and specialists at CFCC performed final testing. After the feedback from outside consultants was integrated into the course, the program went live on Serranus in February. *[See http://serranus.courtinfo.ca.gov/education/jdep.]* Without ever coming near a printing press, the course is now ready for use by any judicial officer who has a Serranus password and a desire to learn online.

Although an online course will never replace the give-and-take and the exchange of ideas that occur in a live class, there is a place for online learning both as a supplement to live programs and as an option for those who learn best outside the classroom. So if you're appointed to the juvenile bench, grab your laptop, find a local coffee house with a Wi-Fi hot spot, and start your online learning. ■

Judge Harbin-Forte

TechGuide: What other subjects for bench officers might be appropriate for online delivery?
Judge Harbin-Forte: An online course on juvenile delinquency is the first thing that comes to mind. A course on small claims and consumer law is also probably feasible. In fact, I think certain aspects of virtually every subject area, from evidence to preliminary hearings to summary judgments, could probably be converted to an online course.

TechGuide: Given the budget climate that may continue over the next several years, do you see a growing need for distance education—for example, online or broadcast delivery?
Judge Harbin-Forte: Clearly distance learning will play a large part in the future of judicial education. Today's budget crisis is a wake-up call for the judicial branch, reminding us that we have to learn how to do all things in a more efficient fashion. We no longer have the luxury of regularly bringing together large groups of judicial officers in one location for all educational programs. The good news is that group learning can still take place, because as judicial officers and court staff get together to listen to broadcasts or even to take an online course simultaneously, the esprit de corps will develop, the camaraderie will build, and a sense of cohesiveness and shared purpose will flourish.

TechGuide: Thanks for doing this interview and for all your help in developing CJER's newest online course. ■

Organizing Your Favorite Web Site Shortcuts in Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator

If you're like most people, you have a lot of shortcuts in your browser's Favorites menu, and now you have to scroll through a long list before you find what you're looking for. Here are a few tips on how to organize your sites so you can find the site you are looking for more quickly and easily.

IN INTERNET EXPLORER

Put Your Sites Into Folders

In the Favorites menu, select "Organize Favorites."

1. A window will open that has a Create Folder button. Click on the button, and a folder icon will open in the right side of the window. Give the folder a general name that describes a category of your favorites, such as "Legal Research" or "News."

2. In the right window, drag the appropriate favorite shortcuts into the new folder.

3. Alternatively, move your favorites to the folder by selecting one of your shortcuts in the right window and clicking on "Move to Folder." A new window will pop up that will allow you to select the folder to which you want to move the favorite. The shortcut will be moved to the folder and will disappear from the list, thereby making your list shorter.

4. You can also rename or delete shortcuts in this window.

Sort Your Favorites

In the Favorites Menu, you can move your most frequently used shortcuts to the top of the list by dragging them.

You can also organize your favorites by alphabetizing them. Pull down the Favorites menu, right-click in the list of shortcuts, and select "Sort by Name." This will sort your shortcuts in alphabetical order, not by frequency of use.

Add a Page to the Links Bar

If you have Web sites that you frequently go to, you can put the shortcuts on your Links bar, which is located next to the Address bar in Internet Explorer. If you don't see the Links bar, click the View menu, select Toolbars, and click Links. If your Links bar is squeezed in at the far right, you can drag it below the Address bar.

To add an icon to the Links bar, go to the Web page and do one of the following:

- Drag the icon preceding the Web address to your Links bar.
- Drag a link from a Web page to your Links bar. (Make sure, however, that the link is to the page and not to the site's home page.)
- Drag a link from your Favorites list to the Links folder in the Organize Favorites window.
- You can organize your links on the Links bar by dragging them to the left or right. Or you can delete a link by right-clicking on the icon and selecting Delete.
- Change the icon associated with a shortcut by right-clicking on the icon, selecting "Properties," and then clicking on the "Change icon" button. Select another icon from the window that pops up.

IN NETSCAPE COMMUNICATOR

Organize Your Bookmark Tabs

In Netscape it's very easy to bookmark a page: you simply drag the bookmark icon to the Bookmarks menu item on the toolbar. So it's probably no wonder that you have accumulated quite a few bookmarks. Fortunately, it's very simple to organize them. Open the Bookmarks menu and choose Edit Bookmarks. In this menu you can:

- View all your folders and bookmarks.
- Move a bookmark or folder to a different place in the list by dragging and dropping it. You can also drag a bookmark and place it in a folder.
- Create a new folder by opening up the File menu and selecting New Folder.
- Delete a bookmark by selecting it and pressing the Delete key.
- Rename a bookmark by highlighting it, then right-clicking and selecting Bookmark Properties. Under the General tab, type a new name in the Name dialogue box, then click on OK.

Add a Bookmarks Tab to Your Sidebar

Netscape 6 has a customizable frame that appears on the left side of the screen where you can keep shortcuts to your favorite Web sites. To see My Sidebar, move the mouse pointer along the left border of the Netscape window until it changes to a hand. Click the handle to open My Sidebar. To add a Bookmarks tab, click "Tabs" at the top of My Sidebar, and select Customize Sidebar from the menu. In the Customize Sidebar window, open the Recommended category and click Bookmarks, then click on Add and OK. ■

End Notes

Sometimes we share information freely and it can affect people we hardly know. For over 10 years I've had a nodding acquaintance with a woman jogger whom I would often see on my weekend runs. We never spoke because we were usually running in opposite directions. I saw her running when she was pregnant and then after she had the baby. Six or 7 years later I saw her running alongside a young boy on a bike and realized that this boy must be the child she had had years before.
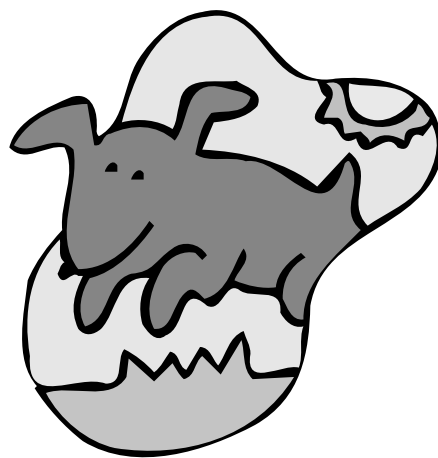
In the past couple of years we've found ourselves running in the same direction a few times and have had a chance to talk. She confirmed that the boy bike rider I had seen with her was the child she had been pregnant with years before. I told her that it was comforting to know that we were both still running regularly after all this time, through changes in family, seasons, and even health.

My running partner on weekend runs is our new dog, Miga, a Portuguese water dog. When we would run into the woman jogger she would greet Miga and tell me about her standard poodle. I asked whether she ran with her poodle and she said no, because he was too active and had a habit of pulling on the leash, which hurt her shoulder. I told her that I had the same problem with Miga and what I had done to correct it was use a gentle leader, which looks a little like a muzzle. This stopped the pulling completely. The woman jogger didn't think her family would approve because it looks so much like a muzzle.

A month or so later as I was running my regular route, I spotted my running acquaintance (she has a very distinctive running posture and style) up ahead. Running right next to her, as politely as you please, was a big, black standard poodle. Miga and I ran faster to catch up to them. The dogs ran and played with each other as we jogged along. She told me that Miga and I had inspired her to try the gentle leader and that she was now taking her poodle on her runs. She confessed that she now enjoys her running even more, and her poodle certainly seemed to share her enthusiasm.

Perhaps a strange story for the *TechGuide*, but part of the reason for the *TechGuide*'s existence is to provide a means to share tips and information. Okay, so they're supposed to relate to technology. But as you can see from my story, small suggestions can sometimes find their way to acceptance and then change. I had no idea that my running acquaintance would follow up on my suggestion, especially because her first response was negative. So I was surprised and pleased to find her running with her dog. I think we might all be surprised where the seeds of our technology tips can take root and blossom. Let's continue to share our knowledge freely and look forward to surprising changes. If you've got a technology tip to share, be sure to send us an e-mail. See you on the Web.

Bob Schindewolf

Bob Schindewolf, Editor